

## INFORMATION OPERATIONS: A CRITICAL REQUIREMENT FOR SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN

BY

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# USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

## **INFORMATION OPERATIONS: A CRITICAL REQUIREMENT FOR SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) operational center of gravity is their will and ability to provide for the needs of the Afghan population. Specifically, ISAF must maintain the support of the people and sustain the ability to influence the neutral or passive majority segment of the population. This cannot be accomplished solely by lethal means. Therefore, ISAF commanders must gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for information activity-producing effects and their contribution to the overall efforts in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). This paper addresses the ineffective employment of information operations in Afghanistan. It demonstrates information operations linkage to the friendly center of gravity as a critical requirement for a comprehensive approach to the campaign strategy. Additionally, the paper provides an overview of how to maintain a "first with the truth" posture, analyzes how the enemy executes their information strategy, and argues for applying an effective targeting model. It concludes with recommendations for a theater information operations strategy as a critical requirement in order to conduct a more effective and integrated campaign for greater success in Afghanistan.





## INFORMATION OPERATIONS: A CRITICAL REQUIREMENT FOR SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN

The International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) operational center of gravity is their will and ability to provide for the needs of the Afghan population in conjunction with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA).<sup>1</sup> The objective is to influence the key target amidst the population---specifically, the neutral or passive majority segment. This cannot be accomplished solely by lethal means, but rather by dominance in the information environment which is most critical to operational success in counterinsurgency operations. Therefore, commanders in theater must understand and embrace the importance of information operations, the most critical requirement enabling protection and full operation of the center of gravity. This paper addresses the ineffective employment of information operations. It demonstrates information operations linkage to the friendly center of gravity as a critical requirement for a balanced, well-integrated and comprehensive approach to the campaign strategy. Additionally, the paper provides an overview of how to maintain a "first with the truth" posture balancing speed and accuracy, analyzes how the enemy executes their information strategy, and argues for an effective targeting model to develop information operations plans and concepts. It concludes with recommendations for more effective, integrated information operations in order to realize an increase in operational effectiveness and greater success in Afghanistan. The recommendations serve to compliment the overall theater information operations strategy. They are substantiated by the comprehensive employment of the ten information activities as outlined in Allied Joint Publication 3.10, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations*.

## Friendly Information Operations Overview

Well over two thousand years ago, Sun Tzu argued for incorporating operations that influence the enemy's will to fight. His axiom, "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill" is often quoted and is a well-utilized epigraph in military writings. He concluded that the primary adversarial target (center of gravity) is the opposing commander's mind, suggesting non-lethal engagement.<sup>2</sup> David Galula, a well-regarded theorist and the author of *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, argued for deliberately separating insurgents from the population, again suggesting non-lethal operations.<sup>3</sup> Even the arguably greatest Western military theorist, Carl Von Clausewitz who stressed the importance of the actual engagement or duel in war, suggested a psychological factor in war. With his famous dictum, "War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will," he described war in two contexts, violence and moral (psychological). While information operations are not limited to non-lethal engagements, the effects of lethal and non-lethal activities are manifested in the information environment (physical, cognitive, and informational), the battleground for counterinsurgency operations.

The United States military carefully studies Sun Tzu, Carl Von Clausewitz, and other prominent theorists who offered ideas that significantly shaped the analysis of causes, characteristics, conduct and consequences of war. Most theorists who address population-centric operations agree that effective targeting of the mind is key to success in counterinsurgency operations. But the United States military continues to struggle with the integrated employment of information activities intended to influence audiences. This is more evident than ever as the United States military exercises its revised doctrinal approaches in a protracted counterinsurgency operation in Afghanistan as

outlined in U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. Now as we grasp the tenants and principles of population-centric operations, it is imperative that we also understand the essential enablers for optimal engagement and execution. While our forces conduct counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, strategic leaders must come to adeptly leverage information and embrace it as critical to success.

As recently as mid-2010, it was evident that the commanders in Afghanistan did not demonstrate a full understanding of and appreciation for information operations in order to effectively employ it. Commanders at ISAF and the newly-created ISAF Joint Command (IJC) sought to apply information operations primarily as a responsive media tool, reducing its criticality to the overall success of the campaign.<sup>4</sup> This was clearly evident with their subjecting the information operations section to a reactive element to manage consequences and crisis. This was ostensibly the result of commanders not fully understanding information operations and a lack of in-depth training and education on how to effectively leverage it.<sup>5</sup> According to U.S. Army FM 3-13, *Information Operations*, information operations is defined as:

...the employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to affect or defend information and information systems, and to influence decision making.<sup>6</sup>

This definition has guided Army information operations since its inception as a career field. However, the definition differs slightly with the verbiage contained in Joint Publication (JP) 3-13, *Joint Doctrine for Information Operations* by not using the term “integrate”.

...the *integrated* employment of the electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence,

disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision-making, while protecting our own.<sup>7</sup>

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), currently leading operations in Afghanistan, defines information operations as:

...a military function to provide advice and coordination of military information activities in order to create desired effects on the will, understanding and capability of adversaries, potential adversaries and other North Atlantic Council approved parties in support of Alliance mission objectives.<sup>8</sup>

This definition is per the Allied Joint Publication (AJP) 3.10. It is more expansive than the previous two, but it omits the terms core, supported, or related functions. This is acceptable, because operational planning that dismisses information operations as mere augmenting elements by applying five narrowly-defined “pillars” is fatally flawed and challenges operational effectiveness. More importantly, the AJP 3.10’s verbiage focuses on targets that may or may not be adversarial. This is by far the most complete and comprehensive description for information operations and it fully supports the notion that the friendly center of gravity is an element composed of characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the comprehensive definition for information operations in NATO operations, the AJP 3.10 lists ten capabilities, tools, and techniques used in support of information objectives: 1) Psychological Operations, 2) Presence, Posture, Profile, 3) Operations Security, 4) Information Security, 5) Deception, 6) Electronic Warfare, 7) Physical Destruction, 8) Key Leader Engagement, 9) Computer Network Operations, and 10) Civil Military Cooperation.<sup>10</sup> The Allied Joint Publication categorizes public affairs as a *separate function*, primarily responsible to inform and educate select

audiences.<sup>11</sup> These various descriptions and definitions of information operations contribute to the commanders' lack of understanding of this important and critical requirement. This deficiency subsequently affected the optimal employment of information operations in Afghanistan.

Proper and effective employment of information operations starts with an understanding by all interested parties that information operations is a staff function with the responsibility to integrate, coordinate and synchronize information activities. Therefore, it is imperative that the commanders create and enforce conditions on the staff that are well conducive to collegial and collaborative efforts to foster an environment of coordination across several staff sections and elements for seamless integration of information operations. Additionally, information operations professionals must be vocal in articulating the definition, roles, and criticality of information operations. Proper employment hinges on the information operations staff's ability to be the consummate advocate for information effects and adept in cross-staff coordination.

As called for in AJP 3.10, coordinating ten military information activities is a daunting task considering six of the ten (Psychological Operations, Operational Security, Information Security, Electronic Warfare, Computer Network Operations, and Civil-Military Cooperation) fall under the auspices of another staff section with its own principal. Further, "Presence, Posture, Profile" and "Physical Destruction" are largely subject to operational planning and on- the-ground operations complimented with effects (desired or undesired) in which the information operations staff section is not normally involved. That leaves "Deception" and "Key Leader Engagement" as the two activities information operations section planners are able to plan and implement. Both

the ISAF and IJC conducted effective Key Leader Engagement operations tied to operational plans. At times, invoking the term information operations implied Key Leader Engagement thus adding to the confusion caused by multiple definitions.

Information operations are ultimately most effective when planned and fully coordinated across all associative staff sections then seamlessly integrated into operational planning, execution and assessment. Consistent with doctrinal staff organization structure, the IJC positioned the public affairs officer on the commander's personal staff while the information operations officer resides as a subordinate on the commander's special staff. This created a conundrum regarding the relationship between public affairs and information operations, one that should be cooperative and seamless. This led to a reduction of information operations' importance to a more responsive and reactive mode—primarily engaged in a media war and not understanding the criticality of information operations.

The information operations planning staff has the responsibility to derive information objectives from the mission-specific strategic and political guidance of the commander; and from those objectives, plan desired effects from operational activities, information activities, themes, and messages. When this occurs, information operations are apt to be integrated in all operational activities; at times it may even be the main effort (especially in counterinsurgency operations).<sup>12</sup>

#### Information Operations, a Critical Capability

To fully appreciate the role of a critical capability and its linkage to the center of gravity, one must understand the genesis of the center of gravity. The center of gravity is a concept developed by Carl Von Clausewitz. He called it, "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends...the point against which all our energies

should be directed.”<sup>13</sup> The United States military considers a "friendly" center of gravity as that element—a characteristic, capability, or locality—that enables one's own or allied forces to accomplish their objectives. While traditional military operational planning was based on the assumption that the center of gravity is a military force or unit with the most effective abilities relative to the overall objective, this is not always the case. A good example of this is counterinsurgency or population-centric operations. Accordingly, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, identifies the friendly center of gravity in a counterinsurgency as the protection of the population that hosts it.<sup>14</sup>

The friendly center of gravity in the Afghanistan theater is an intangible asset (the will and ability to provide for the needs of the population by, with, and through the Afghanistan government) inextricably tied to popular opinion and perception. Failure to adequately identify the friendly center of gravity can have very serious consequences; specifically, the inability to accomplish the military objectives at an acceptable cost and the unconscionable expenditure of lives, time, and materiel in efforts that do not produce decisive strategic or operational results.<sup>15</sup> Careful consideration of the friendly forces' center of gravity and its associated variables is essential, starting with analyzing its critical capabilities, critical requirements, and critical vulnerabilities.<sup>16</sup>

While the friendly center of gravity is clearly articulated in the Commander ISAF guidance, there is no clear indication that subsequent center of gravity analysis (identification of critical requirements, critical capabilities, and critical vulnerabilities) was conducted. Current practices in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan suggests a disconnect between information operations and the overall campaign, due in part to a

lacking doctrinal understanding of information operations, a marginalized relationship to the friendly center of gravity, and a flawed implementation strategy.

<b>Friendly Operational Center of Gravity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ISAF's Will and Ability to provide for the needs of the Afghan Population</li> </ul>	<b>Critical Capabilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ten Information Operations Activities</li> <li>• Protection of human and automated decision-making systems</li> <li>• Targeting the will, understanding, capabilities, and behavior of select audiences</li> </ul>
<b>Critical Requirements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment of integrated, coordinated, and synchronized information activities</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Access to information, physical and cognitive domains</li> <li>• Support from domestic and international public opinion</li> <li>• Mitigate adversary effects on the population</li> </ul>	<b>Critical Vulnerabilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response-based implementation of Information operations</li> <li>• Loss of credibility</li> <li>• No leverage with press/media</li> <li>• Will of the target audience to grant access to the information, physical and cognitive domains</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Friendly Center of Gravity Analysis

The chart (figure 1) depicts a center of gravity analysis. At the heart of the center of gravity are the critical requirements to protect and enable full operation of the center of gravity. Chief among the critical requirements is the employment of integrated information operations. Critical requirements are “essential conditions, resources and means for a critical capability to be fully operative.”<sup>17</sup> Without critical requirements, a center of gravity cannot function successfully and will cease being a source of power that generates the critical capability. Military information activities coordinated through and synchronized by a unit's information operations section are an integral part of this process as they are aimed specifically at affecting the will and understanding of the population (the core of the center of gravity). Thus, information operations are critical to



influence, persuade, and dissuade the populace—the essential and decisive tasks *required* for effective counterinsurgency operations.

In the introduction of FM 3-24, the writers assert, “the military has had to relearn the principles of counterinsurgency throughout its history”. The authors go on to state that, “it is time to institutionalize knowledge of this longstanding form of conflict”.<sup>18</sup> FM 3-24 lists eight historical principles of counterinsurgency: 1) Legitimacy is the Main Objective; 2) You Must Understand the Environment; 3) Unity of Effort is Essential; 4) Intelligence Drives Operations; 5) Prepare for a Long-Term Commitment; 6) Political Factors are Primary; 7) Security Under the Rule of Law is Essential; and 8) Insurgents Must be Separated from Their Cause and Support. The writers suggest adhering to these historical principles as *guideposts* for forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations.<sup>19</sup> However, the next section in FM 3-24 outlines a set of *contemporary imperatives* derived from recent counterinsurgency experiences for successful counterinsurgency operations. The first imperative is “Manage Information and Expectations.”

Information and expectations are related; skillful counterinsurgents manage both. To limit discontent and build support, the HN government and any counterinsurgents assisting it create and maintain a realistic set of expectations among the populace, friendly military forces, and the international community. Information operations are key tools to accomplish this.<sup>20</sup>

Field Manual 3-24 also highlight several *paradoxes* of counterinsurgency operations. One in particular speaks to the criticality of information operations: “Some of the Best Weapons for Counterinsurgents Do Not Shoot”. The writers contend counterinsurgents often achieve the most meaningful success in garnering public support and legitimacy for the host nation government with activities that do not involve

killing insurgents. Arguably, the decisive battle is for the people's minds; hence synchronizing information operations with efforts along the other lines of operation is critical.<sup>21</sup>

### Speed versus Accuracy

General David Patraeus, Commander, ISAF, is one of the primary authors of FM 3-24. Upon assuming command of the International Assistance Force, he disseminated his specific guidance for counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan to all members of the International Security Assistance Force members. There are twenty-four specific directives, but two directly speak to information operations: 1) Be first with the truth and 2) Fight the information war aggressively.<sup>22</sup> The language for these directives was chosen carefully and imply a reliance on *speed* (first and aggressively) and *accuracy* (truth). On the surface, they seem to be equally important and suggest a zero sum game. However, in the information environment of counterinsurgency operations, one cannot be sacrificed for the other; a proper balance is required. Whether pursuing speed or accuracy, the overall intent (where the two axes converge) is *credibility* – one of the essential requirements for an effective information operations strategy.

Credibility is the power to elicit belief. The lack of accuracy, not speed, is the largest and most detrimental threat to credibility. In Carlson and Abelson's book, *Factors Affecting Credibility in Psychological Warfare Communications*, the authors define credibility as a necessary condition for a communication to be effective and its contents to be believed by an audience.<sup>23</sup> It is not difficult for a command to tell the truth about a matter. Nor it is difficult to improve a command's processes to disseminate messages and images quicker; however, it is significantly more difficult to repair loss credibility. The directive to be first with the truth must take into account a

truth that may be both favorable and/or unfavorable to friendly forces. In most cases, the insurgents are well aware of the truth, but there is no competitor armed with “favorable information” and intentions to promulgate truth in this context.

The actual goal for COMISAF’s directive is to get an accurate friendly forces version of the story out first. Friendly forces must be the first to release the desired truthful message(s) in order to favorably affect the information domain, maintain credibility, get ahead of the insurgents’ dis-information, and ultimately compliment the desired operational effects. However, in Afghanistan, the desired message often required time-consuming investigation, assessment, verification, and confirmation. This created the conundrum of balancing speed and accuracy because within minutes after an operation the insurgents released their version of what took place. The insurgents’ version, always unfavorable to ISAF, was virally disseminated. An aggressive pursuit of speed in disseminating information to the targeted audiences can serve a damaging blow to the credibility of ISAF’s objectives. Speed is more useful during consequence management. Thus, accuracy for the sake of credibility should be the deciding factor to avoid the dissemination of mis-information. Speed in the reaction mode often contributes to mis-information that provides the enemy an opportunity to exploit gaps in credibility against the friendly forces’ efforts. Information operations are limited when called upon primarily for reacting and responding to events.

Another paradox asserted in FM 3-24 is, “Sometimes Doing Nothing Is the Best Reaction”. Often insurgents carry out a terrorist act or guerrilla raid with the primary purpose of enticing counterinsurgents to overreact, or at least to react in a way that insurgents can exploit—for example, opening fire on a crowd or executing a clearing

operation that creates more enemies than it takes off the streets. If an assessment of the effects of a course of action determines that more negative than positive effects may result, an alternative should be considered—potentially including not communicating (promulgating words, images, and actions).<sup>24</sup>

### The Enemy's Information Strategy

There are two pillars to the insurgents' strategy: 1) He cannot defeat the stronger opponent, and 2) credibility is based on actions (actual or perceived) not just words. The friendly forces' dilemma of speed and accuracy as competing interests creates a "wedge" vulnerable to enemy attacks in the information environment. In *The Terrorist Approach to Information Operations*, the authors say: "Terrorists act in the physical environment not to make tactical gains (therein), but to wage strategic battle in the information environment; therefore, the physical environment enables many of the activities in the information environment to occur."<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, it is arguable that the enemy forces' major objective is to destroy the friendly forces' credibility – discredit friendly forces' actions, messages, and overall intent – in order to win the native population in both the physical and informational environmental battle grounds.

Careful review of the enemy's tactics suggests its operational analysis examines how to minimize any physical and psychological separation between the insurgency and the population and maximize that same separation between the friendly forces and the population. In other words, it uses influence as its main strategic effort to win the population's hearts and minds. While the insurgency can afford to lose fighters and leaders, it can ill-afford to lose control of its influence on the population.<sup>26</sup> As the friendly forces aim to win the population's hearts and minds, the enemy's information strategy suggests they are willing to exchange long-term hearts for short-term minds.

Winning hearts and minds are achieved through trust and relationships and trust is earned over time. The ability to influence changes in population perceptions and adversary behavior and the decision making process of an adversary can take long periods of time to become effective.<sup>27</sup> The insurgents' information approach is hinged on ISAF's inability to prove a continued presence and garner the necessary support from the population. Thus, as with the friendly forces' counterinsurgency efforts, the strength of an insurgency comes from population support. Without it, insurgents are extremely vulnerable to isolation and subject to attacks from the larger and more regular capable forces, reducing their operational effectiveness.

The major adversarial networks representing the primary threat to Afghan security and ISAF objectives have made significant inroads in Afghanistan, mostly in the southern and eastern regions. Violent attacks constitute the most visible part of the insurgency and are designed to further recruiting, financing, and create fear in the population. These influence effects are intended to alienate the population and to weaken the government by demonstrating its inability to provide security for the people.<sup>28</sup> The insurgents' analysis is ostensibly comprehensive, starting with the people and their issues, and then moving on to its aims to understand the friendly forces' strategy, get into the decision cycle, and predict likely actions. This approach is enabled by information, a powerful factor in warfare.

The rapid evolution of the information environment has caused information to rise in importance to where it is effectively used by adversaries as an asymmetric weapon of choice. The improvised explosive device may be a tactical kinetic weapon, but it is, more importantly, a strategic information weapon when the detonator is paired with a videographer.<sup>29</sup>

The insurgents know incidents of this nature will draw a reaction from ISAF, who will immediately enter into the mental wargame of "speed and accuracy" or "first with the

truth.” This act of terror and intimidation sends a strong message in the information environment. It is enabled by the unfortunate reality that negative information is more influential than positive information and it travels faster. Therefore, the occurrences of the insurgents’ intimidating tactics are subject to promulgation by the insurgents and its media networks. Further, it allows the insurgents to create their desired perceptions and effects.

The population needs to make choices in support of one side or the other; therefore, both the insurgents and counterinsurgents place a higher premium on controlling the people’s will than controlling terrain. Both insurgents and counterinsurgents employ strategies to separate each other from the population while engendering the population’s support. For the counterinsurgent, all energies should be directed at gaining and maintaining control over the population and winning its support. Power emanates from the people; without their support, neither the insurgent nor the counterinsurgent can win.<sup>30</sup> Simply put, the insurgents are pursuing opportunities to exploit or create any disparities between the counterinsurgent forces’ words and deeds (actions and images) that create the population’s cognitive information effect of distrust and discredit. The insurgents clearly understand that the destruction of the friendly forces’ credibility subsequently obstructs ISAF’s ability to inform and influence key audiences.

Against overwhelming firepower, the insurgents know they cannot win a force-on-force conflict with ISAF, but in the communications battle, the insurgents appear to hold the edge. For example, the Taliban use frequency modulation transmitters, the internet, and threatening notes known as “night letters”, that have proven effective at either

cowing citizens or winning them over to their message of jihad.<sup>31</sup> In other tactics, the insurgents accuse ISAF troops of killing civilians during operations that are believed to be “staged civilian deaths” then post fabricated footage to maintain the separation between the people and the counter-insurgents. The enemy’s information strategy focused on painting a picture through media outlets that the struggle will continue as long as there are ISAF troops in their country. While the Afghanistan insurgents’ efforts are less aggressive in targeting the United States’ public, their intent is that eventually the American (and other troop contributing nations’) population will grow impatient and demand troop withdrawal.

#### Applying the Decide, Detect, Deliver and Assess Targeting Method at Information Operations Coordination Boards

Targeting is the contribution to the military decision making process used to focus assets and efforts to achieve the commander’s intent. Field Manual 3-13 opens with a powerful declaration that, “Information is an element of combat power; commanders conduct *information operations* to apply it.”<sup>32</sup> The objective of information operations is an outcome that influences a target’s perception and understanding followed by effects to its will, capabilities and ultimately behavior. The ground work for all information operations activities is the identification of targets and corresponding desired effects. Information operations assist the targeting process by identifying where information activities could be applied in order to create specific effects in support of the commander’s mission objectives.

The decide, detect, deliver, and assess (D3A) targeting methodology is traditionally used to translate the commander’s intent into a plan of action for lethal effects. According to FM 3-09.12, *Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Field*

*Artillery Target Acquisition*, the functions associated with this methodology help the commander decide what to attack, how to acquire those targets, and how to attack them in a way that achieves the desired effects. Assessment logically follows in order to determine effectiveness and if subsequent engagement is necessary. There is a clear nexus between targeting for lethal and non-lethal effects (information operations).

Appendix E of FM 3-13 outlines the approach to information operations targeting. The concept closely mirrors the field artillery planner's approach to targeting (D3A). Procedurally, the development of a non-lethal concept of engagement is the same as traditional targeting methods, but the difference is in the desired effects and types of targets.<sup>33</sup> In conventional conflict, enemy formations and functions are targeted and the battlefield is linearly divided into deep, close, and rear operations. This construct is quite conducive to applying the D3A targeting methodology to achieve desired lethal effects. But in population-centric and more ambiguous environments, the target set is not exclusively the adversary. Targets include the populace's societal institutions and the battlefield is a nonlinear maneuver space defined in terms of time, events, (and perception) rather than geographic locations.<sup>34</sup>

The psychological operations (PSYOP) planners conduct target audience analysis (TAA) — a detailed and systematic examination of the demographic group (target audience – TA) to whom the end PSYOP product will be marketed for a desired effect. While this is a core task of the PSYOP planning staff, the end result of TAA and corresponding intent to target should be coordinated and synchronized with the information operations directorate optimally at the information operations coordination board (IOCB).<sup>35</sup> The IOCB is an analyzing, coordinating, synchronizing, decision and



recommending forum for the implementation of information operations. The purpose of the IOCB is to assemble a grouping of predetermined staff representatives to synchronize and coordinate the contributions of all information related elements' activities.

Ideally, in addition to the information operations functional representatives, staff elements across all functions should be regular attendees at IOCBs, especially the Combined-Joint (CJ) 2, CJ3, and CJ35.<sup>36</sup> The role of the IOCB is to ensure that military information activities are coherent and synchronized with other actions that directly or potentially affects the information environment. It provides the results of initial coordination of target nominations related to information and information systems. It also provides advice on possible effects in the information environment created by other military actions.<sup>37</sup> These forums are the primary means to achieve synchronization across functional areas. They allow the unit to increase the speed of information sharing, increase cross pollination of ideas, and execute planning more quickly. The D3A targeting methodology would serve as an effective tool in IOCBs to ensure coordinated information activities are nested with operational plans.

At the ISAF Joint Command (IJC), the operational headquarters in Afghanistan, the Information Operations Directorate conducted its information operations coordination board (IOCB) sessions in isolation without participation from key command leaders or operational planners.<sup>38</sup> To a degree, the stakeholders were able to coordinate and synchronize information activities, but the resulting deliverable was not integrated into operational planning. This is clearly indicative that information

operations were not viewed as a primary warfighting capability (element of combat power) whose integration is critical to the success of the overall campaign.

#### Recommended Information Strategy

The International Security Assistance Force's information strategy should be based on efforts to win the Afghan population's hearts and minds. While this cannot be accomplished in the short term, it can be achieved through matching words and deeds, building trust relationships, and ultimately separating the people from the insurgency and connecting them to their government. It is essential that commanders gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for information activity-producing effects and their contribution to the overall efforts in Operation Enduring Freedom. If the ISAF friendly center of gravity is indeed their will and ability to provide for the needs of the Afghan population, this is a war of perception. Therefore, in order to influence the neutral or passive majority segment and shape its perception of the insurgency and the counterinsurgents, effective information operations is the critical capability to do so.

While information operations could be considered the main effort in counterinsurgency operations, Joint Publication 3-13 instructs us to view information operations as a supporting effort to the overarching joint operation, fully integrated into the planning process.<sup>39</sup> However, one should not conclude that a supporting effort is not critical. Information operations are indeed critical in the information environment, the key terrain in counterinsurgency operations. Leaders at all levels must be trained on information effects and integrating information operations during planning and operations at their respective echelons. With a solid doctrinal understanding of information operations and associated effects, units could deploy knowing information is as critical as lethal actions in determining the outcome of operations.

### Recommendation #1 - Doctrine

The International Security Assistance Force is a NATO Command. Therefore, leaders must integrate a comprehensive information operations strategy based on the tactics, techniques, and procedures outlined in AJP 3.10. However, the guidance as outlined in AJP 3.10 is not exhaustively consistent with guidance set forth in the FM and JP 3-13, the primary sources for United States military information operations. It would be optimal if United States Army information operations officers could rely on the tenants in FM 3-13 for army operations, apply the same tenants when assigned to a joint staff per JP 3-13, then leverage his or her experience while serving in a multi-national environment without having to re-learn the empirical practices of information operations according to the principles outlined in AJP 3.10. It is imperative that the United States military reviews the standing information operations doctrine and consolidate and simplify the confusing, deficient, overlapping, and disparate guidance. There must be a (combined) and joint doctrinal effort and subsequent product that is easily adaptable into multi-national and coalition (plans) and operations.<sup>40</sup>

### Recommendation #2 – Planning and Integration

The full integration of information operations in the operational environment with the overall campaign operations starts with leaders' ensuring a seat at the table for information operations planners during all aspects of planning. Accordingly, information operations practitioners must be able to explain their craft. By focusing on measures of effectiveness vice measures of performance, they would be more successful at educating commanders on the military information activities and capabilities. This would inevitably result in convincing operational planners and commanders how the military information activities compliment operations. Further, it would result in

incorporating information operations all mission plans – not just in a reactive mode to respond to consequences.

### Recommendation #3 – Consequence Management

While information operations is more effective when fully integrated into plans and operations, certain incidents warrant actions or management in the information environment. At the ISAF Joint Command headquarters, information operations officers with duty on the operations floor worked to respond to and manage consequences. Their primary duties were executing a series of battle drills focused on five likely incidents requiring information-effects activities. This practice is well-executed and should continue.<sup>41</sup> However, commanders should be careful not to reduce the overall intent of information operations to responsive consequence management, but rather well-planned and targeted information activities. Ultimately, when information effects are considered during planning; they are easier to integrate during crisis or consequence management.

### Recommendation #4 – Targeting and the IOCB

The information operations leadership should make every attempt to implement the decide, detect, deliver assess (D3A) targeting methodology as the premiere model for non-lethal engagements that delve deeper into getting inside the adversary's decision cycle. The information operations coordination boards (IOCB) is one of the most effective methods used to affect information operations synchronization. With full staff functional and senior leader involvement, it can serve as the primary venue for information operations integration, coordination, synchronization and assessment. Using the D3A sequence as the standing agenda for IOCBs would prove effective in attempting to coordinate and synchronize information activities.

## Recommendation #5 – Words, Deeds, and Credibility

Commanders in Afghanistan should place a higher premium on credibility that may conversely result in sacrificing speed when responding to incidents. Additionally, as Dr. Stephen Biddle, from The Council on Foreign Relations argued, “ISAF should focus on matching words with actions.” He described,

In places like Kunar Province, we have successfully designed integrated military-politico-economic operations to connect local Afghan populations with the government and create a political narrative that puts the Taliban on the outside, killing innocent Afghans, and ourselves on the inside, defending them...this strategy makes for a more effective communications because words are matched by actions.<sup>42</sup>

Many describe the war in Afghanistan as a war of ideas where perceptions derive from actions, such as how we interact with the population and how quickly things improve.<sup>43</sup>

While ISAF-controlled media outlets regularly broadcasts to the local population to increase the flow of information “beating the drum” of the coalitions mission, intent, and deeds, the strategy of winning the hearts and minds in Afghanistan is quite difficult and must be pursued with diligence.

## Conclusion

Information operations represent the manifestation of the axiom, “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.” When information operations planners coordinate, integrate, and synchronize information activities and capabilities, ISAF will experience a more effective theater information operations strategy. When information operations are leveraged to gain a military advantage that achieve the effect of influencing behavior, the ISAF center of gravity will be protected and adequately enabled for operation. When information operations are inextricably nested with the campaign and operations plans, they will be embraced as the critical requirement for success in

Operation Enduring Freedom. These three imperatives coupled with the comprehensive employment of the ten information activities as outlined in Allied Joint Publication 3.10, will enable the International Security Assistance Force to realize greater success in Afghanistan as it executes information operations as a critical capability.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> General Stanley A. McChrystal, COMISAF's Initial Assessment (Headquarters, International Security Assistance Force, August 2009), 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel B. Griffin, *Art of War* (Oxford University Press, 193), 77.

<sup>3</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency: Warfare Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger Security International, 1964), 77.

<sup>4</sup> The International IJC was established November 12<sup>th</sup> 2009. It oversees the day-to-day operations of Coalition Forces in Afghanistan. The IJC is located near the Kabul International Airport and it is composed of approximately 1,000 personnel from the 43 member nations that make up the international coalition.

<sup>5</sup> The author served as the Chief of Operations for the Information Operations Directorate at the ISAF Joint Command, September 2009 – June 2010.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Information Operations: Doctrine, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Field Manual 3-13 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, November 28, 2003), iii.

<sup>7</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*, Joint Publication 3-13 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 13, 2006), ix, xii.

<sup>8</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations*, Allied Joint Publication 3.10, pg 1-3. NAC approved parties may include adversaries, potential adversaries, decision makers, cultural groups, elements of the international community and others who may be informed by Alliance information activities.

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Dale C. Eikmeier, "Center of Gravity Analysis," *Military Review* (July-August 2004): <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/eikmeier.pdf> (accessed 21 December 2010).

<sup>10</sup> NATO, *Capabilities, Tools and Techniques Used in Support of Information Objectives*, 1-8 thru 1-10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 595.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual 3-24 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, December 15, 2006), 3-13.

<sup>15</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Campaign Planning*, Joint Publication 5-00.1, (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 25, 2002), II-06.

<sup>16</sup> Joe Strange, *Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities* (Quantico, VA: U.S. Marine Corps Association, 1996), ix.

<sup>17</sup> Eikmeier, "Center of Gravity Analysis"

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, ix.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1-20.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1-24, 1-25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 1-27.

<sup>22</sup> General David H. Patraeus, "COMISAF's Counterinsurgency Guidance", August 1, 2010, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/the-afghan-hands-blog/commanders-blog/comisaf-guidance-01-aug-2010.html> (accessed October 1, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Earl Carlson and Herbert I. Abelson, *Factors Affecting Credibility in Psychological Warfare Communications*, (Human Resources Research Office, George Washington University, Silver Springs, MD, 1956), 7.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1-27.

<sup>25</sup> Rob Earl and Norman Emery, *Terrorist Approach to Information Operations* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2003), [http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2003/Jun/03Jun\\_Earl.pdf](http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2003/Jun/03Jun_Earl.pdf) (accessed November 22, 2010)

<sup>26</sup> McChrystal, COMISAF's Initial Assessment, 2-11.

<sup>27</sup> Tim Foxley, "Countering Taliban Information Operations in Afghanistan," PRISM, No. 4, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/countering-taliban-information-operations.html> (accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Dennis M. Murphy, "Talking the Talk: Why Warfighters Don't Understand Information Operations," May 2009, Center for Strategic Leadership, U.S. Army War College Vol 4-09. (May 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Colonel Peter R. Mansoor, U.S. Army, and Major Mark S. Ulrich, "Linking Doctrine to Action: A new COIN Center-of-Gravity Analysis," *Military Review* (September-October 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Greg Bruno, "Winning the Information War in Afghanistan and Paskistan," May 11, 2009, [http://www.cfr.org/publication/19330/winning\\_the\\_information\\_war\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_and\\_pakistan](http://www.cfr.org/publication/19330/winning_the_information_war_in_afghanistan_and_pakistan) (accessed 21 January 2011)

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Information Operations*, iii.

<sup>33</sup> Chief Warrant Officer Two Richard L. Gonzales and Major (Retired) Marc J. Romanych, AD, "Nonlethal Targeting Revisited," *Filed Artillery Journal* (May-June 2000).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> In the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) Headquarters, the IOCB is among the series of Boards, Bureaus, Centers, Cells and Working Groups (B2C2WGs). For planning purposes, military headquarters develop a series of B2C2WGs. The B2C2WGs allow the Corps to increase the speed of information sharing, increase cross pollination of ideas, and execute planning more quickly. Staff primaries assign functional representatives to these B2C2WGs to best fit requirements.

<sup>36</sup> Per JP 1-0, CJ2 (Intelligence), CJ3 (Operations), CJ 35 (Future Operations).

<sup>37</sup> NATO, *Capabilities, Tools and Techniques Used in Support of Information Objectives*, 2A1.

<sup>38</sup> The author served as the Chief of Operations for the Information Operations Directorate at the ISAF Joint Command, September 2009 – June 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine for Information Operations*, ix, xii.

<sup>40</sup> Murphy, "Talking the Talk: Why Warfighters Don't Understand Information Operations."

<sup>41</sup> The author served as the Chief of Operations for the Information Operations Directorate at the ISAF Joint Command, September 2009 – June 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Bruno, "Winning the Information War in Afghanistan and Paskistan."

<sup>43</sup> McChrystal, COMISAF's Initial Assessment, 1-2.